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Ronda McNae

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Our HR complaint to MICROSOFT - falls on deaf ears

When will HR honor, protect, and defend their employees?



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This past July, I helped my husband write an official complaint to Microsoft HR after learning there was nothing previously reported in his file. At the least, there wasn't even a record of his complaint that he had been verbally threatened and harassed during work hours on campus.

Since I helped craft this letter, I do believe I have part ownership of it and I don't feel I need to ask permission to share it.

**Arjuna Capital** called me with the good news November 30th, 2021 post shareholder meeting with Microsoft. The excitement and accomplishment was felt in her tone. She had a "WE DID IT!" attitude. Unfortunately, I couldn't help but poke holes.

### Why now?

*Microsoft committed to releasing a transparency report to shareholders assessing the effectiveness of the company's workplace sexual harassment policies, including the results of any comprehensive, independent audit/investigations, analysis of policies and practices, and commitments to create a safe, and inclusive work environment. -Geekwire.com*

That's honorable and noble, if it were true.

Behind the curtains, our formal complaint was (**again**) not investigated.

**July 8th 2021**— Formal HR complaint (HR was made aware of this in March 2020. No initial investigation, interview, or follow up)

**August 3rd 2021**— A phone call. By this point they requested that Will take the call without me present. Thankfully we have paper thin walls and ring cameras installed everywhere. I play back the conversation and it's disheartening.

**September & October**, Will reached out via email to follow up a couple times.

Response:







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Well, I do at least. How you treat employees, protect employees, honor employees, defend employees, and at times making an exception to do the same for the employees spouse/children **IF** a conflict shall arise.

*I have saved a photo my 9 year old daughter happened to take the following day on my phone. One of the most important pieces of evidence I have. Bruises on both arms. Clearly showing fingertips that I fought. Another picture showing my location when I initially ran to hide. A text conversation where I'm barely communicating to the sitter.*

**There are grey areas and then there's RIGHT AND WRONG.**

When the physical line is crossed, without question there should absolutely be a neutral third party to follow up and investigate.

At the least, follow up with your employee. Encourage therapy, time off, and offer some kind of resource/support group.

*To: Microsoft. July 8, 2021*

*I love working for Microsoft. The people on my team are amazing, my manager and leadership team are empathetic, helping us achieve strategic results. My LT recognizes me as a top performer and I consistently receive outstanding reviews and compensation awards. I have been responsible for leading and influencing dozens of new technical solutions with Partners while helping one Partner add over \$1 billion in new customer revenues. For all the pride and gratitude I have in my work at Microsoft, I am at a point where I can no longer stay silent. I*



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*Context: From 2018–2020, I worked closely with the Executive of a global software/services Partner. This Partner represented a significant account and I was eager to build a positive relationship. Ultimately, this individual took advantage of our unequal power dynamic to assault my wife and subject both of us to prolonged abuse and mistreatment over eight months.*

*I was responsible for influencing and winning technical mindshare in a heavily competitive environment against AWS and Google. I felt deeply responsible for winning new business on our platforms and felt this individual's invitation to attend his IPO celebration weekend was imperative to maintain credibility, as well as bolster my influential relationship with him and their organization. At the time, I was covering for the loss of my PDM who had been let go from Microsoft a month earlier. Acting as both PTS and PDM induced enormous pressure to succeed and I was concerned about losing significant momentum if I were not present.*

*The Executive placed so much importance on joining him that when my flight couldn't arrive in time to join the dinner, I asked my wife to go in my place. I partially asked my wife to attend because I knew the girlfriend had also canceled her attendance at the last moment and I felt personally responsible to demonstrate support at the celebration. This was not my family's first interaction with him; he had introduced his girlfriend to us and a friendship between the four of us had developed over the prior three months. We felt the pressure of her canceled attendance and somehow believed we owed him to go in her place. I was afraid of the negative repercussions towards me and Microsoft if we missed this event. My wife attended his dinner in my place, which ultimately resulted in her incapacitation. While my wife was unable to give consent, the Executive sexually assaulted her.*

*My wife bears the trauma and emotional scars from the rape, but I continue to battle ongoing mental health issues including anxiety and depression, as well as stress from continuing to support this Partner organization until I could no longer stand it and reported to my Manager four months after the assault.*

*Complaint Summary: Microsoft HR should have (and could have) done more to support and protect me as an employee. A formal investigation was not kicked off internally or externally,*



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*If we had been properly supported by Microsoft's resources when we made our HR report in March 2020, we would have been empowered to act differently to resolve this matter—pursuing criminal charges instead of waiting until 2021 to file a police report. After a great deal of therapy (ongoing), my wife and I are better able to recognize our reactive, trauma-induced responses through those 8 months and the time since. In the darkest period, my wife and I were barely hanging on, living in cognitive dissonance while the individual continued to execute his power dynamic using manipulation, fear and gaslighting. His predatory behavior took advantage of us and his lies almost ripped our marriage apart, leading me down a dark path to suicidal thoughts during the holidays.*

*Because of the genuine relationship and deep level of trust established with my Manager, I felt brave enough in February 2020 to finally speak to him about these incidents. He listened, asked questions, and with my permission contacted his Director regarding next steps. Our Director was significantly empathetic and wanted to help as much as she could. She followed the guidance of contacting HR on my behalf to ask for help. She was provided what I believe was a scripted email to share with me stating Microsoft had “zero liability” in this matter. There were no follow-up questions by HR/CELA to learn more about my situation. No one contacted me directly for further details about my report. I believe HR too quickly made this decision based on secondhand conversations. My Manager and Director made the business decision to remove me from supporting this Partner and continued to check in with me frequently.*

*We provided an immense amount of detail to HR in March 2020 about this rape and sexual assault. Unfortunately, HR chose to focus only on the rape incident and would not investigate the entirety of our allegations over the 8-month period communicating to us through my Director in writing “zero liability” since the rape happened to my wife and not me, the employee. Additionally, HR stated that it was out of scope because it didn't happen during work hours or at a work event as if the assault happened in a vacuum with no regard for the circumstances leading up to or following it. We were left to fend for ourselves and fight this executive who had deep pockets and resources without the support of Microsoft, which was the basis for this relationship in the first place. With an attorney's help, we were able to gain a resolution which covered counseling but forced us to sign an NDA in June 2020*



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gaslighting, fear of my job being terminated, and indirectly threatening me during a work event on our Redmond campus (unlawful harassment). It is only by attending weekly counseling sessions, a week-long intensive marriage workshop, and a Trauma/Healing intensive workshop for my wife after her own suicidal experience that 18 months later I can understand all of this. When I inquired with HR in June 2021 asking about what had been documented in my HR or CELA file, it was to determine how open I could be discussing this matter post-NDA. It is shocking to me that HR stated my file was empty. Although there is email correspondence stating Microsoft had zero liability, it seems like I may not be able to prove we had a documented conversation with HR prior to June 15, 2020. This is troubling especially since my management team followed protocols to report this to HR.

Reporting this complaint now has not been an easy decision. It would be easier to continue to be quiet and compliant, not ruffling feathers as this may also set me up for inspection or consequences for my actions in some way. However, I felt it was essential to speak up about our current process and lack of systems to help employees report and gain support when it comes to topics of sexual assault, rape and harassment. HR needs a system in place that offers those who have been harmed on the job—or because of work-related relationships—well-trained, empathetic experts, and advocates to help through their time of crisis and trauma. In hindsight, I wish I could have taken an extended period of time off from work, but I felt it was not appropriate based on the job requirements and expectations to not show weakness. My Manager helped me take advantage of the Covid time off, which helped greatly and I am forever grateful to his empathy and patience—but even with this in mind, I broke up my time and returned to work halfway through to complete business planning and be present.

We reported these incidents a month before Satya's April 2020 mail to all employees sharing updates about a new Employee Advocacy team being established for workplace sexual harassment. I am unsure what would need to change to get the attention required—perhaps if I were more senior or female, HR would have done more to investigate these incidents, support me, call to check on my health, or inspect the broken vendor code of conduct policies. Or, if I had taken my life in my darkest hour, would Microsoft have paid attention once the truth was uncovered that a work relationship caused enough harm to myself and marriage that I didn't see an alternative way out of a hostile work environment? I raise this to point out the





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*believe Microsoft needs and should do more to support and advocate for their employees regardless of gender, position, or technicality of being “during work hours.”*

*I’ve been advised to personally and directly file a complaint with HR for formal documentation.*

Sincerely,

Will McNae, Sr. Partner Technical Strategist

IF YOU’RE NOT PART OF THE SOLUTION

YOU’RE PART OF THE PROBLEM

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